

Statement by Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Senate Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
Hearing on Alzheimer's Disease
Rm 216 Hart, 9:30 am
April 3, 2001

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Specter, Ranking Member Harkin and the entire Subcommittee for holding this important hearing and for your ongoing support for research funding for Alzheimer's Disease.

In addition, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the 4 million Americans afflicted and the countless others affected by this devastating illness.

In 1999, I approached my good friend Chris Smith with one thing in mind to make Alzheimer's a top priority issue for Congress. That June, we started the Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease. Our objectives included increasing federal research dollars to aid in the discovery of treatments, preventative measures and a cure; and addressing the needs of patients and their caregivers burdened with the daily duty of dealing with an afflicted loved one.

Today the Task Force is at a membership of 133 and growing. And thanks to the efforts of many, the 106th Congress took three significant steps toward meeting the goals of the Task Force. These steps included: 1) increasing research funding for Alzheimer's by \$85 million 2) creating a new clinical research and training awards program to fund physician-scientists in clinical research and 3) clarifying the "homebound" definition in the Medicare law so that all beneficiaries could attend religious services as well as adult day care. For Alzheimer's beneficiaries this was a crucial clarification in the law as adult day care is not only a proven therapeutic treatment for patients but it provides a much needed break in the day to family caregivers.

This Congress we want to build on our past successes by encouraging scientists to build on the progress that we've made in Alzheimer's research.

Research is medicine's field of dreams from which we harvest new findings about the causes, treatment, and prevention of disease. Since 1950, we have learned more about health and disease than in the entire history of medicine. In fact, we've eliminated some of the major scourges that killed us at the turn of the century like smallpox and diphtheria.

That's why we must make sure that research not only survives but thrives.

We are asking for a \$200 million increase in federal funding for the National Institutes of Health with an ultimate goal of \$1 billion by 2003. In addition, we ask that the program which the Task Force was instrumental in authorizing The Alzheimer's Clinical Research and Training Awards be fully funded at \$2.25 million.

In addition to building on successful research, it's also important to build on successful programs. Specifically, we are asking that funding for the Alzheimer's Matching Grant Program currently available in only 16 states be increased by \$6 million to \$25 million. Expanding this program which encourages innovation in long-term care, will enable all 50 states to reach Alzheimer's families in underserved areas, particularly minority and rural communities.

As many of us here today know, Alzheimer's Disease is cruel and indiscriminate -- it attacks the brain,

captures the mind and erodes the mental and physical abilities of its victim before ultimately stealing his or her life. If you have one parent affected with Alzheimer's you are three times more likely to develop the disease yourself and if both or your parents are affected, you are at a fivefold increase in risk.

In fiscal year 2001, the federal government spent an estimated \$520 million on Alzheimer's research this is a modest investment compared with the annual \$100 billion cost of the disease. We know that the disease process begins 10-20 years before symptoms begin. If science can find a way to delay the onset of Alzheimer's for even five years, our nation will save an estimated \$50 billion in annual health and long term care costs.

In 1900, the average life expectancy was 48. In 1999, life expectancy at birth reached an all-time high of 77 years. In 1900 about 1 in 25 Americans were over the age of 65. In 1990, the proportion rose to 1 in 8 -- a 10-fold increase. It is estimated that by the year 2040, 1 in 5 Americans will be over the age of 65 and there will be almost four times as many very old people over the age of 85 as there are today. Right now we know that one in ten Americans over age 65 and half of all persons over the age of 85 have Alzheimer's. This means that by 2050 if we fail to find a way to prevent or cure Alzheimer's 14 million Americans we fall victim.

Pasteur once observed that "Chance favors the prepared mind." We can choose to prepare, or we can turn a blind eye and leave the fate of our future aging population to chance.

So, as we leave here this morning, let us all continue to work together to soon reach that day when children will have to turn to their history books to find out what Alzheimer's Disease was.

I thank you.

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